

Rev. Lynne Ogren Zion Lutheran Church, Lewistown, Montana
July 12, 2020 6th Sunday after Pentecost, Year A Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen

I have to admit that I've never been very comfortable with the parable of the sower. The thing that bothers me about this parable is that it seems to be up to me if I am the kind of soil—or person—in which God's word can grow and thrive. Most days I'm pretty sure my heart is the hard or rocky ground or overgrown by thorns, any of which are so preoccupied by the obstacles that get in the way of receiving God's word that it has a hard time growing in me.

Then this week, I discovered a poem written about this parable that helped me see its meaning in a new way. The beauty of parables is that they are meant to be pondered from different perspectives. The word parable means to "throw alongside." Two things are thrown alongside one another for us to sit with for a while, to wonder about, and not to have to solve with any one right answer. This whole chapter of Matthew is a compilation of many of Jesus' parables so we'll be looking at more of them in the coming weeks.

Today we have the image of a sower with seed and the various kinds of ground they land on thrown alongside the idea God's word being planted in the hearts of those who hear it.

Now, before we get to the poem, we need to remember how we encounter God's word. In a document produced by the ELCA called "The Use of the Means of Grace"ⁱ we learn that Lutherans understand the word of God in three ways.

First, "Jesus Christ is the Word of God incarnate." Jesus came into the world to incarnate, or embody, God's word for the world. As Jesus speaks and acts in and among us, so God speaks and acts.

Secondly, "The proclamation of God's message to us is both Law and Gospel." Proclamation refers to the public reading of Scripture, preaching, teaching, and all the ways God's word is expressed for the building up of faith and in service to our neighbor.

And finally, "the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the written Word of God." Translated into various languages and dialects, the Bible gives us access to God's word to read and study for ourselves.

Back to the poem, which it printed on one side of the insert in your bulletin. It is titled "A sower went out to sow..." written by Steve Garnaas-Holmes, a retired pastor. Pastor Holmes writes poems and reflections for his blog called "Unfailing Light."

One word of preparation—in the first line the poet uses the female pronoun "herself" to refer to God. I realize that might be unexpected for some. The poem doesn't dwell there, I just wanted you to be aware of it so it doesn't startled you and we can focus more on the remainder of the poem.

A sower went out to sow...
—Matthew 13.3

God will sow the seed of herself in you
and sometimes you won't know it.
Sometimes you'll suspect but not trust.
Sometimes you'll believe but chicken out.
Sometimes you'll do your best to receive but fail.
And sometimes grace will bear fruit in you.

You'll need to forgive
and sometimes you won't try,
or try and get hung up on your own deserving,
or get discouraged when the other doesn't get it.
And sometimes forgiveness will set you free.

God will sow you in the world
and sometimes you won't belong.
Sometimes people will misunderstand.
Sometimes they'll dislike you or use you.
And sometimes you'll blossom.

Sometimes you'll try to sow seeds of justice
but you'll do a lousy job.
Or do it well, but folks will resist.
Or they'll care but they'll be overwhelmed by an unjust society.
And sometimes your witness will bear fruit.

Failure,
failure,
failure,
fruit.
All of it grace. All of it.ⁱⁱ

In the first stanza, the seed of God's word is God's own self whom we know best in the person of Jesus Christ. It is not just what God says or words written in the Bible, the word is the very presence of God. God enters our lives in many ways, sometimes unexpected or even unnoticed at first.

It can be hard to trust that God has anything in particular to say to us or that what God might be calling us to do is something we are actually capable of. And once in a while, grace—the very essence of God—takes root in us and the fruit of faith grows within our hearts.

In the next stanza, we recognize our hardness of heart, the thorns of anger and resentment that can so easily take over. We focus more on ourselves, what we deserve, or how long it is

taking for others to step up and take responsibility. And then there is that seed of forgiveness that we have received from God for our own sinfulness. That seed takes root and we are freed to forgive as we have been forgiven, and then, love again, even when we still might not understand or agree.

I love the image in the third stanza, that God will sow us into the world. Remember that the word of God is experienced in proclamation and in service. I have never thought that I might be the seed in this parable. A seed is, after all, a container for the plant that has yet to emerge from it. What a thought that God sees fit to place the blessings of grace, forgiveness, hope, and new life in the container of those who love and belong to God.

And, just like Jesus, sometimes we don't belong and we are misunderstood and even rejected because we are God's children—God's seeds. But there are times when we blossom with God's gifts and blessings—just like when we said to Kit this morning, "Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven." Every now and then, we blossom, we shine, and God is glorified!

Then, there are days, as in the fourth stanza, when we serve as the sower of God's word in the world. We are called through Holy Baptism to sow the seeds that "proclaim Christ through word and deed, care for others and the world God made, and work for justice and peace."ⁱⁱⁱ

Sometimes the seeds of God's word that we spread will take root, and sometimes they won't. We can't always control that. And sometimes we will offer a word that someone else needs to hear, that frees them or blesses them or comforts them.

God's word is meant to bear fruit, as Jesus says. It is meant to bring forth life of one kind or another. The word that we hear in worship, the word that we speak in our prayers and responses, the word that we receive in the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper is the word embodied by Jesus Christ and by the body of Christ in churches like this one.

Sometimes we fail in the ways we speak and live and serve as the seeds of God's word. And sometimes, by grace, God finds a way for that word to sprout and grow in faith and in love.

These seeds that we are, and that we are given, are all nurtured and watered by the love of God, as we heard in our Isaiah reading. We remember these waters of life each time we remember our baptisms, gathered here around the font, or daily as we wash the dishes or water our gardens or listen to the rain fall. We are showered with God's word, God's love, God's life and blessing.

As the seeds of God's word are planted in us, as we serve as God's seeds of life, as we spread God's word to those we meet, God's word does take root and grow—by God's grace. This is God's purpose, and God promises that the word will return to God when it has fulfilled what God intends—the fruits of love, peace, and grace.

It is our privilege and our joy to be invited into this amazing mission with Jesus Christ and with one another.

Thanks be to God! Amen

Musical Offering

This is My Word by Pepper Choplin^{iv}

As the snow falls from heaven,
As it comes in swirling showers from the sky,
So is my Word.
As the rains bring the water to the earth that is thirsty and dry,
So is my Word.
And the Word of my mouth, it shall not return empty:
It will bless the earth wherever it is heard.
This is my Word.

As the rain brings renewal
And the tender buds begin to come alive,
So is my Word.
Giving seed to the sower,
And the bread to the hungry 'til they thrive,
So is my Word.
And the Word of my mouth, it shall not return empty;
It will bless the earth wherever it is heard.
This is my Word.

O Lord, when I am weary,
When I feel the days I'm living are in vain,
My God, help me be faithful to the Word
You have given to proclaim.
Proclaim the Word.

And you will go out in joy,
And be led forth in peace,
And the hills will break before you into song.
So be faithful, brave and true,
For I will go before you,
And when your earthly journey here is done.
I'll say well done, I'll say well done!
I'll say well done, well done!

As the snow falls from heaven,
And the rain comes in showers from the sky,
This is my Word.

ⁱ https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/The_Use_of_Means_of_Grace-Why_It_Matters.pdf?_ga=2.205532816.2024349597.1594323906-879726341.1585072233

ⁱⁱ Steve Garnaas-Holmes, *Unfolding Light*, July 9, 2020, www.unfoldinglight.net

ⁱⁱⁱ *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, p. 228, Rite of Holy Baptism

^{iv} <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vF7xJA1MAI>